
The impact of ecological systems by Bronfenbrenner, Theory of Cognitive Development by Piaget and Theory of Moral Development by Kohlberg's in A Child Called "It," a Book by Dave Pelzer

In the book A Child Called "It" by Dave Pelzer, the reader learns how differently Pelzer developed compared to most children. Because of the situation that he was raised in, he goes through many stages of human development in a different way and at different points of his life when compared to his peers. The effects that Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems, Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development, and Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development all had on Pelzer are very evident in this book.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

Unfortunately, Pelzer was not protected by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems. For most people, these ecological systems are what makes everything 'click', or connects every aspect of our lives. (Feldman, 2013). However, for Dave, everything was kept separate, causing him to have negative mesosystems. Because his mom was not involved in his schooling, Dave had little to none motivation to do well in school. He was held back in first grade and was constantly getting in trouble for stealing food. He is known as a bad kid, or the "food-thief", and states that his principal knew who he was because of how often he was getting caught stealing food. Pelzer would get so scared when sent to the principal's office in fear that the principal would call his mom, which he knew would make things worse for him at home. His mom would punish him for stealing the food, but seemingly did not care about how well he did in school. For example, when his teacher sent a letter home to his mom about how well he had been doing in class, Dave was so excited to show her. But, his mom tore the letter to shreds, and shouted at him that he would never impress her, and she wished he was dead (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 104). His mom's lack of support for his schooling caused him to fail to care about his own education.

Another example of a mesosystem that has failed Dave is the relationship between his 'friends' and his family. Although Dave didn't have typical friends, the closest thing he had were the neighborhood boys who he was, on very rare occasions, allowed to play with. However, the neighborhood boys were more friends of Dave's brother than Dave's own friends. Had Dave had a healthy relationship with friends, he could have been comfortable enough to be able to tell them what was going on at home, and he would have been able to get away from the abuse earlier. Instead, the neighborhood boys were of no help or friendship to Dave. Instead, they

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were partially part of the problem. For instance, when Dave was in the bathtub, his brothers and the neighborhood boys would come and look at him, sometimes even say rude things to him (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 112). Ideally, these 'friends' could have had a better relationship with Dave, his brothers, and the rest of his family and could have help put an end to the abuse early on, when they started noticing things were suspicious between Dave and his mother.

There was also exosystem's, parts of his environment that influenced him, even though he was not directly involved in them (Feldman, 2013). The relationship between Dave's mother and father directly influenced him, even though he was not directly involved in the relationship. Dave mentions a specific instance when he was in bed but could hear his parents fighting. Although he was not what they originally started fighting over, he states that he would soon become the object of their battle. "I knew father was trying to help, but in bed I still shivered with fear. I knew he would lose, making things worse for me the next day," (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 51). When his parents would fight, it would make life harder for him, as his mother always took her anger out Dave.

In the beginning, Pelzers macrosystem failed him. There were many people whom knew that Pelzer was not being treated right at home, such as the school nurse or principal. Pelzer discusses how he eventually opened up to the school nurse and principal about what was going on, but there were many signs of child abuse early on which should have been picked up on, which I believe in today's society they would have been. The nurse, teachers and principal should have been concerned by his constant bruising's and weird stories of how they got there. The neighbors also could have done something, since they knew he was treated differently than his brothers, always being punished, and never allowed to play outside with them. However, in the end his macrosystem was what helped him when the principal got the police involved and they got him out of the home.

Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

For a number of reasons, I believe that Pelzer is in the concrete operational stage of Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development. In this stage, there is an increase in logic (Feldman, 2013). I think that Pelzer is in this stage because he is very smart when it comes to thinking ahead of his mom, and surviving his punishments, and how to survive. For example, he creates a great plan for him to get food. "Finally, I devised a plan that might work. Students were not allowed to leave the playground during lunch recess, so nobody would expect me to leave. My idea was to sneak away from the playground and run to the local grocery store, and steal cookies, bread, chips, or whatever I could. In my mind, I planned every step of the scheme," (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 58-59). This plan required a lot of logical thought from Peltzer, as most of his plans had not been working, and his mother had been finding out that he had been getting food. After his first trip to the store, he was so proud of himself for completing the task. However, he left the box of

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graham crackers in the trash, which was emptied before he had the chance to get to it. So, next time he learned to hide them elsewhere. By trial and error, he found a plan that worked, which proves that his plans are flexible as they are constantly improving.

When he got caught stealing from the store during lunch recess, he once again found a new plan that worked. Just like his other plans, this plan also required lots of thought for the timing and process. "I timed my restroom break so that the teacher excused me from the classroom just after the delivery truck dropped off its supply of frozen lunches. I crept into the cafeteria and snatched a few frozen trays, then I scurried to the restroom," (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 63-64). I believe this is a prime example of the concrete operational stage of cognitive development because he was able to use logic and reasoning to master this plan, in order to get the food that he needed.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Reasoning

Throughout his life, Pelzer was constantly stealing food, something he knew was wrong, but needed to be done in order for him to survive. This reflects upon Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning, which I believe Pelzer is stuck in the first stage, pre-conventional, because he is constantly basing his behavior upon the punishments or rewards involved (Feldman, 2013). Stealing food was not something that Pelzer did because he wanted to, he did it because he needed the food since he was not being fed at home. Since he knew it was wrong, he was always afraid of being caught because of the punishments that would come, just like in stage 1- which is orientated towards avoid punishments (Feldman, 2013). "My stomach coiled with a combination of fear and anticipation. Anticipation because I knew within seconds, I would have something to put in my stomach. Fear because I also knew that at any time, I could get stealing," (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 48-49). Pelzer was always afraid of being caught because he knew that being caught with food was the worst crime, and the punishments to come would be worse than he could ever imagine.

On the other hand, on the rare occasion that there was a reward at stake, he took full advantage. This is a great example of stage 2, which is orientated towards getting a reward by obeying the rules (Feldman, 2013). "At the end of the first week, she passed out ice cream to those students whose behavior had been good. I didn't get any the first week, but I tried harder and received my reward at the end of the week," (Pelzer, 1995, pp. 115). The possibility of receiving ice cream, or any reward, is very motivating for many kids, but especially for Pelzer. Since he is rarely given food at home, nonetheless given ice cream, this motivated him to be on his best behavior, which clearly worked because he was given the ice cream. Because these rewards and punishments were always in the back of his mind and what motivated his behavior, Pelzer was in the pre-conventional stage of moral reasoning.

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Conclusion

During the period described in this book, I learned a lot about how Pelzer developed. Because of his situation, he was not able to develop the same way as his peers, but he did go through many of the stages. He developed quickly cognitively as he was able think abstractly, such as during the 'gas chamber' punishment when he would hold the rag over his nostrils and mouth, or when he found different ways to distract his mom, which he first learned when he was forced over the stove. But when it came to moral reasoning, he was still stuck in the first stage, when his peers were most likely ahead of him. Because of different environments and lifestyles, everybody develops in a different way, at a different rate.

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